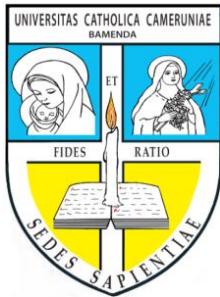


CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CAMEROON [CATUC], BAMENDA



CITY OF WISDOM

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AS NECESSARY  
FOR CLASSROOM CONNECTEDNESS  
AND STUDENTS' SELF-DISCIPLINE IN  
HANNAH ARENDT**

**A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Award of a  
Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy**

**BY**  
**MBEY LEKWA Stev**  
**Registration N°: 270820**

**Supervisor**  
**Rev. Fr Michael SUH NIBA, PhD**

**June 2023**

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled: **TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AS NECESSARY FOR CLASSROOM CONNECTEDNESS AND STUDENTS' SELF-DISCIPLINE IN HANNAH ARENDT**, is the original work of MBEY LEKWA STEV, Registration Number 270820, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy.

**STUDENT**

MBEY LEKWA STEV

Signature : .....

Date: .....

**SUPERVISOR**

REV. FR MICHAEL SUH NIBA (PhD)

Signature: .....

Date: .....

**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

REV. FR PETER TAKOV (PhD)

Signature: .....

Date: .....

**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CAMEROON, CATUC, BAMENDA**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**DISSERTATION SUBMISSION FORM**

**The following student MBEY LEKWA STEV**

Registration Number **270820**

Dissertation Title **TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AS NECESSARY FOR CLASSROOM  
CONNECTEDNESS AND STUDENTS' SELF-DISCIPLINE IN HANNAH ARENDT**

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Date\_\_\_\_\_

Head of Department\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**DEDICATION**

TO

MARIE MBEY, MY BELOVED MOTHER, AND JACQUES MBEY, MY LATE FATHER

**AND**

TO

ALL THE TEACHERS

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**(CATUC), BAMENDA**

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In most sub-Saharan African countries, the teachers represented a highly trusted authority in the eyes of their students at all levels. They incarnated an uncontested media of transmitting core values of Africa. They were models of morality to the extent of correcting a child by beating even in front of his/her parents whenever the child's behavior did not meet expectations, be it in school, on the roads, in the market, etc. In this context, teachers were related more deeply to their learners beyond the normal classroom setup. As Nel Noddings noted, teachers were more concerned with and cared for the holistic wellbeing of the learners.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, students were more connected to the teacher in class in an attitude of total respect and with an atmosphere of discipline, which cannot but favor teaching and the students' understanding.

However, we have observed with Hannah Arendt<sup>2</sup> that this is no longer the case. Teachers have lost this authority. They are no longer courageous enough to take strict corrective decisions on students. The extensive application of the student-centered approach to education and some liberal laws have helped give an unrestrained freedom to the learner while limiting the impact of the teacher. In today's Cameroon, learners from rich families appear to be more authoritative than their teachers by putting their social status above learning. Some students at times threaten the teacher with words like: "don't joke with me", "be careful, I can pay your miserable salary", "I will tell my father and be sure you get fired", and so on. Thus, teachers have become powerless in front of students to the extent of being killed by stabbing.<sup>3</sup> In this context, it becomes very difficult to ensure effective teaching and learning given that the teacher-student relationship has turned into a relation of violence, threat and danger. Hence

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. N. NODDINGS, *The Challenge to Care in School: An Alternative Approach to Education*, Teachers College Press, New York 2005, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975) is a German-born American political philosopher who studied under Martin Heidegger and escaped from Nazism in the USA where she became a university lecturer.

<sup>3</sup> M. MEFO, "Student Stabs School Principal in Yaoundé", 2022, in <https://mimimefoinfos.com>, consulted on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

this study aims at restoring the indispensable authoritative place and value of the teacher that are getting lost in most schools in Cameroon.

It begs the question as per how can the teacher's authority be utilized so as to create classroom connectedness and instill self-discipline in students, while maintaining the dialogical spirit of the learner-centered system of education. Besides, we seek to discover what accounts for the teachers' loss of authority, esteem and value to the point that their salary is not only insignificant but also underpaid in Cameroon. Also, do authoritative teachers need to use corporeal punishment to ensure classroom management and respect from students?

The question of loss of authority will be addressed in the thought of Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future*, which she published in 1961. Then, it should be noted that Arendt considered this loss most especially in the political sphere, not in education. She referred to authority in education simply as the root of the loss in politics. What, then, is Arendt's consideration of authority? What implications does it have in education? Does authority result from the personality of the teacher or from his mastery of the subject-matter? Moreover, we shall seek to discover how to form a generation of young Africans who are self-disciplined and truly Africanized in values proper to Africa.

For a deeper understanding of Arendt's view and its implications to education in Cameroon, we shall use the analytic and prescriptive methods of philosophy whereby an in-depth analysis of the concept of authority will be made and contextualized in the Cameroonian society today. For this reason, this work is divided into three chapters. In chapter one, we elaborate on Arendt's notion of authority. Chapter two addresses the opposing views of authority in traditional and liberal classrooms. The last chapter is an evaluation of the role of authority in fostering classroom connectedness and students' self-discipline in Cameroon.

# CHAPTER ONE

## ARENDT'S NOTION OF AUTHORITY

### INTRODUCTION

The hermeneutical phenomenon of Hans G. Gadamer advocates for an encounter in which the interpreter and the text are engaged in dialogue with one another in a reflexive manner.<sup>4</sup> That is, on one hand the interpreter meets the text with his prejudices and his tradition which constitute his horizon or perspective of understanding. On the other hand, the text brings the historical context and worldview of the author through which he understood his subject matter in the present context of the interpreter. In this line, the researcher's preoccupation in this chapter is to use the hermeneutical approach of Gadamer as method of dialoguing with Arendt's corpus on the question of authority. Afterwards, an interpretation of her thought will be provided as fruit of understanding between the author and the interpreter. To this effect, the researcher has divided this section into: background, distinctions between authority, power and persuasion, Greco-Roman origins of the concept, teacher's authority as natural necessity, and Arendt's categorical imperative.

#### 1.1. BACKGROUND TO ARENDT'S AUTHORITY

When Arendt published *Between Past and Future* in 1961, the American society was faced by crises like racial segregation between the white population and the people of color – blacks –, struggles for civil rights, etc.<sup>5</sup> And the central point of these crises was the assumed superiority, – or better put – the authority of either the white population over the black, or of men over women. This authority was perceived as an ontological and natural factor by the white and men respectively. In this context of crises, Arendt noticed instances of violence or coercion in the relationships between the white and black, men and women, adults and children,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. E. LINGE, "Editor's Introduction", in H. G. GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1976, xii.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. HAYDEN, *Hannah Arendt Key Concepts*, Routledge, New York 2014, 6.

etc. But she was convinced that authority had nothing to do with violence. That is why she felt compelled to elaborate her views on the problem of authority. Let us review first the background of the question of authority as she sees it being already lost.

### **1.1.1. Background to the Problem of Loss of Authority**

It was her claim that we should no longer ask the question “what is authority?”. Rather, we should ask “what was authority?”, because she thought it was no longer existing. She says: “... it is my contention that we are tempted and entitled to raise this question because authority has vanished from the modern world.”<sup>6</sup> Authority for her had been lost since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, and fortunately for us, it is not authority “in general” which has gone. It is only a specific type which has been lost, the specific form which existed in the Occident for a long period.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the authority which is being considered by Arendt is typically of the Western world, which shows itself in such political authoritarian forms of government as Fascism and Nazism, and in the religious dogmas of Christianity. We may contrast it with the form of authority of traditional rulers in Africa which is not absolutist like that of the west.

### **1.1.2. Definition and Types of Authority**

Etymologically, the term authority originates from Latin – *auctoritas*. It is a derivative of two verbs *augere* and *auctare*, all meaning “to augment, to develop.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, we can understand the concept *auctoritas* as the act of bringing new elements to that which exists already but which is still incomplete. Also, one can detect that the noun *auctor* in it, which means “author” in the English language. Consequently, the term *auctoritas* can imply the capacity of a person to claim ownership of what belongs to him or her, like an author over his/her works.<sup>10</sup> Beside the etymological definition, André Lalande provided a three-

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<sup>6</sup> H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, Viking Press, New York 1961, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> F. GAFFIOT, *Le Gaffiot de Poche Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, Hachette, Paris 2001, 78.79.

<sup>10</sup> This is just an inference from our analysis, not a definition of authority per se.

dimensional definition of authority. But we shall limit ourselves only to the first in which he maintains that authority is the superiority or personal ascendancy by virtue of which one makes oneself believe, obey, respect, one imposes on the judgment, the will and the feeling of others.<sup>11</sup> The definition of Lalande is peculiar in that it contains a key word provided by Arendt's definition. For her, "authority is whatever makes people obey."<sup>12</sup> This definition stems from the views of those who advocate a return to authority and those who oppose such a return. The first group's view is known as Conservatism and the second is referred to as Liberalism. We shall discuss each one of them in the next chapter. What are the types of authority?

As for the types of authority, Arendt proposes two, namely, personal authority and authority of office or function.<sup>13</sup> Personal authority refers to the personality trait which nature has granted to an individual with regard to others. It is expressed in the relationship between parent and child, or teacher and pupil. And the authority of office, which we call functional authority here, refers to the unquestionable superiority one has over others thanks to his office or function.

## **1.2. DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTHORITY, POWER AND PERSUASION**

Arendt began her study with the *via negativa*, by showing what authority has never been before saying what it is. She aimed at clarifying doubts because "since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence."<sup>14</sup> Authority is essentially different from power, she argued, on the basis that authority does not require any use of violence, force or coercion in order to impose itself. And wherever force is employed, authority has failed.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, authority should not be related to persuasion either, because the latter presupposes a certain degree of equality and makes use of argumentation. She

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<sup>11</sup> « Supériorité ou ascendant personnels en vertu desquels on se fait croire, obéir, respecter, on impose au jugement, à la volonté, au sentiment d'autrui ». A. LALANDE, *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie*, Quadrige/PUF, Paris 2010, 102.

<sup>12</sup> H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *On Violence*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, San Diego 1970, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

believes that wherever arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance or suspense.<sup>16</sup> But Arendt is convinced that authority is intrinsically linked with hierarchy, that is, the position each one occupies in the society.<sup>17</sup>

### **1.3. THE GRECO-ROMAN ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY**

Being a political philosopher, Arendt attributes the cause of the crisis of loss of authority to politics. She ascertains that “this crisis [of authority], apparent since the inception of the century, is political in origin and nature.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it is the loss of authority in politics which has extended to other spheres of life such as education and childrearing in family life.<sup>19</sup> For a better understanding of these origins, let us first look at the major causes of loss of authority.

#### **1.3.1. Causes of Loss of Authority**

Given that we have observed the loss of authority in politics, there should be a cause for it. And Arendt advances two major causes of loss of authority:

The rise of political movements intent upon replacing the party system, and the development of a new totalitarian form of government, took place against a background of a more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional authorities.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, Arendt considers that all other metaphors of authority relations such as parents-children, teachers-pupils, have all collapsed simultaneously with the political authority.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, “a father can lose his authority either by beating the child or by starting to argue with him,”<sup>22</sup> Arendt says; and by implication, a teacher can lose his authority over students either by behaving like a tyrant or treating them like equals.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>20</sup> H. ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, San Diego 1973, 260; *Between Past and Future*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 92.

<sup>22</sup> H. ARENDT, *On Violence*, 45.

Furthermore, the loss of authority is perceived as the logical consequence of the loss of tradition and religion. It is the final phase of the process of loss of tradition and religion. The loss of tradition consists in the fact that new generations of individuals have partially abandoned their history. They are cut off from the past such that the link between the elders and the young people is no longer there.<sup>23</sup> It is as if the young people have formed their own world outside of parental control or adult injunctions. The loss of religion is reflected in the rejection of some religious beliefs or dogmas,<sup>24</sup> on account of certain discoveries in science from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as the heliocentric view of cosmology of Copernicus. Such scientific discoveries brought serious doubts on some religious assumptions, and the Church leaders of the time were unable to disprove the veracity of those discoveries without relying solely on the Bible. However, the loss of tradition and religion does not directly mean the loss of the past and of faith. One can still have faith in God even if he has doubts on some elements of the doctrine about God.

These two losses were crowned in the loss of authority which is tantamount to the loss of the pillars of the world, bringing total instability in the cosmos to the point that everything can transform itself into anything else and at any moment.<sup>25</sup> The loss of authority is equal to the loss of the basic principles of nature, such as gravitation, which govern the universe. She further precises that the crisis of loss of authority in America is related to three basic assumptions. First, that there exists a world which belongs solely to children, in which adults' influence is strictly forbidden. Second, that the teacher is simply someone who can teach anything, without mastery of any particular subject. And the third is the famous learning-by-doing theory of pragmatism according to which one can know and understand only what one has practiced.<sup>26</sup> With all these ideas, students are shown to be left to their own resources to

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 181-182.

struggle, and the teacher's source of authority as one who knows more and can do more than his students is no longer effective.<sup>27</sup> But how did the Roman and Greek societies perceive the concept of authority?

### 1.3.2. The Roman Origin of Authority

The Roman Empire has exercised great authority and influence on the history of humanity. In the words of Karl Jaspers: "... Rome drew the whole of the ancient world into its empire."<sup>28</sup> However, the greatness of Rome did not occur only during this period of Empire. It began at the foundation of the Kingdom of Rome by Romulus in 753 BC, and during the Republic. For a Roman *civis*, the superiority or authority of Rome results from the glorious actions of illustrious ancestors who contributed in the building up of the city, beginning with the founder himself. For, the Romans were deeply convinced that the act of founding was sacred and divine,<sup>29</sup> because the newly erected city "offered the gods of the people a permanent home."<sup>30</sup> Thus, it was a moral obligation for each citizen to work towards the preservation of the *civitas* by engaging in political affairs.

But one can be worried as per how the Romans could link authority with foundation. Arendt would reply that it was precisely the task of those who command to augment the foundation, that is, to continue setting the basis for the future through their decisions.<sup>31</sup> And those who had authority during the Republic Period were the Senators or *Patres*. They received it either by heritage or tradition from those who laid the foundations of all things to come, those whom the Romans referred to as *Maiores* – ancestors.<sup>32</sup> The inference is that the authority of the living derived simply from their glorious past, from their illustrious dead ancestors. That

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 182.

<sup>28</sup> K. JASPERS, *The Origin and Goal of History*, M. BULLOCK, tr., Yale University Press, New Haven 1953, 215-216.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 120.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

is, the authority of a Roman was not something arising from within him or embedded in his personality. It was given him from a source other than himself.<sup>33</sup> What about the Greek origin?

### 1.3.3. The Greek Origin of Authority

Contrary to the Roman world, the Greek society did not have any vocabulary referring to the idea of authority. It seems surprising that there was no word implying the idea authority in the hometown of two of the greatest thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, whose philosophies remain references in history. The concept of authority is solely of Roman origin as we have seen above,<sup>34</sup> and Arendt recounts the case of the Greek historian, Dion Cassius, who reported the impossibility of translating the term in Greek language while writing about the history of Rome.<sup>35</sup> However, Arendt affirms that this was not an impediment for these two great thinkers to talk about some realities which reflect the relation of authority in their society. And some examples found in their texts depict a type of authority which is neither coercive nor persuasive, but rather something compelling in itself, like self-evident truths, arising from within the person.<sup>36</sup> This begs the question as to what constitutes authority for these two great figures.

#### 1.3.3.1. Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato narrates, in book VII of the *Republic*, a very meaningful anecdote which has had a great impact in philosophy and politics. The aim of Plato's political philosophy was to find out the best possible form of government for Athenians, due to the injustice suffered by his master, Socrates.<sup>37</sup> In this line, Arendt thinks that Plato sought to establish the authority of reason in the management of the affairs of the *polis*, through the rule of the Philosopher-king. The story tells of some people who lived in a dark cave. Condemned to look only at the wall in front of them, they could see only their shadows as reflected by the fire lit behind them, and they believed these shadows were real. None could go out of that cave, until one made a great

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. T. MOMMSEN, *Roman Constitutional Law*, 1888<sup>3</sup>, 952; ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 233.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. PLATO, *Republic* 543a; H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 114.

effort and succeeded to go out where he saw the pure sky's light for the first time, and this one is the philosopher.

The philosopher-king is one who has contemplated pure ideas outside the cave.<sup>38</sup> Upon coming back to the cave, the philosopher realizes the difference between him, who has contemplated the ideas, and the rest of the cave dwellers. He finds it difficult to communicate these ideas to them because they would not believe him. Therefore, he has to desire political power for two reasons. First, in order to have domination over the rest for his own safety, and to establish these ideas as standards and measures of all judgement.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, because he has seen the goodness of knowing such ideas and their potentiality to transform the society. So, he is therefore the expert in ideas. Brief, the concept of authority in Plato has to do with the superiority of the knowledgeable expert over the ignorant layman, the former being the master while the latter is the slave.<sup>40</sup> However, Arendt criticizes Plato here by saying that the philosopher's capacity to wonder is the real source of his authority over the many.<sup>41</sup>

### ***1.3.3.2. Aristotle's Natural Authority***

Aristotle for his part, viewed authority as a natural factor existing in any society because there exist always those who rule and those who are ruled.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore nature itself "which established the difference . . . between the younger and the older ones, destined the ones to be ruled and the others to rule."<sup>43</sup> But Arendt disagreed with Aristotle here by stating that the adult-young relationship is not authoritative as such, but rather pedagogic by essence through which actual leaders teach potential ones in view of the future.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. PLATO, *Statesman* 260c; H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 108.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 115.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1332b 12-36.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 118.

#### **1.4. TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AS NATURAL NECESSITY**

One of the strongest affirmations of Arendt is that authority is a natural necessity in the field of education and childrearing. She argues that: “... it has spread to such pre-political areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity ...”<sup>45</sup> The stress laid in this quote shows the conservative approach of Arendt towards education. So, for her, authority is a natural requirement in education for two reasons. First, because of the total dependence of the child on the parents. Second, because of the need of preserving an already established civilization by introducing the young to a world which is still strange and unknown to them. Moreover, in “the crisis in education”, Arendt associates this authority of adults over the young with the responsibility the former have of helping the latter grow and develop their full capacities for a better continuation of the world.<sup>46</sup> Adult citizens have the right and duty to guide the younger ones to know the world and their culture and how they should live so as to continue developing and preserving it to generations after them. And the young have the obligation to follow the guidance of the adults who pre-existed them. Hence, the essence of education is natality or giving birth into the world.<sup>47</sup> But how is authority manifested?

#### **1.5. ARENDT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE**

It is Arendt’s contention that authority must in no way be affirmed by the use of coercive methods or argumentative discussions. The teacher must neither beat nor argue with the student.<sup>48</sup> For her, beating the student is a sign of failure of authority; and arguing makes the student look equal to the teacher, which is not the case because the teacher-pupil relation is

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<sup>45</sup> H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 92.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *On Violence*, 45.

inherently one of inequality.”<sup>49</sup> Now, what should teachers do in a situation whereby they can neither beat nor argue with wayward students? How can they help discipline such students?

## CONCLUSION

This chapter was focused on elucidating the background situation which prompted Arendt to develop her concept of authority, and to capture the essence of authority in her view. Briefly, authority is whatever compels someone to obey, without use of violence or argumentation. But this authority has been slaughtered on the altar of public affairs and most especially in education due to some assumptions that find glory in the liberty of the learner. This has given birth to the debate as to whether education should be conservative or liberative, a debate that is worth dabbling in because on it lies the question of the teacher’s authority. Therefore, the conservative and liberal views that dominate the practice of education, the extent to which the freedom of the learner is required, and the place of the teacher in the whole enterprise of education, shall be our concern in the next chapter.

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<sup>49</sup> M. GORDON, *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing Our Common World*, Westview Press, Colorado 2001, 133.

# CHAPTER TWO

## AUTHORITY IN TRADITIONAL AND LIBERAL CLASSROOMS

### INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt, being of the opinion that authority should be considered a natural necessity in education and childrearing, because of the helplessness or total dependence of the child on adults,<sup>50</sup> lays emphasis on the superiority of adults over the younger ones by showing the role the former have to play for the growth of the latter in the society; a role which is the condition *sine qua non* in their relationship. This view of Arendt is a reflection of the conservative approach to education. However, many modern philosophers advocate for a liberal approach to education. For that reason, this section aims at elucidating these two approaches by associating them with the teacher-centered philosophy of William Bagley and the learner-centered method of John Dewey. Afterwards, the synthetic view of authority of Parker Palmer will be briefly evaluated as a subject-centered approach. But before that, let us cast an eye on what Locke says about authority.

### 2.1. RELATION OF AUTHORITY IN LOCKE

John Locke ascertains that it is preferable that the father establishes and confirms his authority as early as possible in the life of the child. For him, familiarity and liberty constitute a danger if they are granted during infancy, because the child still lacks the capacity of judgment.<sup>51</sup> Instead, familiarity becomes a necessity when the child has grown up in reasoning, capable of directing his life alone.<sup>52</sup> Locke affirms also that this manner of approach is not limited to parents alone. But it is applicable to all those who have authority over children, and by implication to teachers.<sup>53</sup> Siméon Essama, in his doctoral thesis, considered the relation of

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> J. LOCKE, *Pensées sur l'Education des Enfants*, COSTE, tr., Librairie CH. De la Grave, Paris 1886, 80.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, I. SHAPIRO, ed., Yale University Press, New Haven 2003, 126.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. LOCKE, *Pensées sur l'Education des Enfants*, 118.

authority from a moral dimension. For him, the authority of the teacher is of a type of power which is exercised on the basis of some factors such as the legitimacy of the teacher, consent of students, school objectives, shared values and norms.<sup>54</sup>

## **2.2. THE CONSERVATIVE METHOD OF INSTRUCTION**

The practice of teaching has been thought off, for centuries, as an exchange whereby the teacher poured out his knowledge of a subject matter on students. This exchange has been referred to as the traditional or conservative method of teaching.<sup>55</sup> Hence, the teacher is placed at the center of the educational practice whereby the study of great-books constitutes the substratum of the curriculum.<sup>56</sup> Among the strongest supporters of this method of teaching, the philosopher William Bagley stands out tall. But how does Bagley consider it?

### **2.2.1. William Bagley's Essentialism**

William Bagley is widely regarded as a pioneer of Essentialism, an educational philosophy which came to light in the 1930s. Its adherents advocate that children should learn the traditional basic subjects or “essentials” of knowledge like Reading, Writing, Science, Mathematics, History, Art and Music in the deepest way possible.<sup>57</sup> Hence, we can say that Essentialism is based on the assumptions that there exists a body of knowledge, skills and character traits that the society – or teachers, – expect all the students to develop.<sup>58</sup> In this line, Bagley thought that school subjects were tools for modifying students behavior or instinctual tendencies. This implies that the lives of students were supposedly transformed by following the lessons in classrooms with textbooks.<sup>59</sup> In order to attain this transformation, Bagley argued

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. S. ESSAMA, *Trois Entrepreneurs de Morale à Amvöe : Une Etude de Cas de la Relation d'autorité dans une Ecole Primaire du Cameroun*, (Doctoral Thesis), Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa 2012, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. A. ACQUAH et al., “School of Thoughts of the Essentialist Philosophers on the Aims of Education, Role of Education and the Focus of Education: Implications for Curriculum Development and Practice in Ghana,” in *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 32, 2017, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Cf. S. TOZER, “Essentialism, Perennialism, and the ‘Isms’ Approach”, in D. C. PHILIPS, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*, Sage, Los Angeles 2014, 296.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. J. WATRAS, “Developing a Democratic View of Academic Subject Matters: John Dewey, William Chandler Bagley, and Boyd Henry Bode”, in *Philosophical Studies in Education*, Vol.43, Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society 2012, 164.

that teachers should make proper and careful selection of those instincts or tendencies that could become useful habits for the society.

Among these instincts, Bagley enumerates: play, curiosity, imitation, and repetition, which he called adaptive instincts.<sup>60</sup> For him, adaptive instincts constitute the means of controlling human conduct, and education should begin by addressing these instincts first. The instinct of play manifests itself in students' engagement in an a-finalistic, purposeless activity. Curiosity shows itself in the unreasoned desire to explore one's milieu. Imitation expresses itself in the unconscious following of what others do; while repetition consists in copying one's own past acts without consciousness of the telos of repeating those actions.<sup>61</sup>

However, Bagley questioned himself to know how someone could determine the worth of a conduct-control media and what types of control should be perpetuated by the teacher in his students. In response, he proposed the value of social efficiency as a working guide or an aim of educational theory.<sup>62</sup> The inference is that teachers should aim at developing socially-efficient individuals who are characterized by three features, namely, economic efficiency or ability to be as productive as others; negative morality or willingness to sacrifice one's desires when their gratification would interfere with the economic efficiency of others, and positive morality or the willingness to sacrifice one's desires when they do not contribute to social progress.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Bagley discarded some academic subjects such as geography, history, music, for the simple reason that they seem not directly applicable in the daily lives of students.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, they had very little value in controlling conduct, even though they fostered aesthetic sensibilities. But subjects like Arithmetic and grammar are praiseworthy and

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. W. C. BAGLEY, *Educational Values*, The MacMillan Company, New York 1911, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. W. C. BAGLEY, *Educational Values*, 139-141.

useful for students, he thought. Summarily, Bagley believed “the social significance of general education was to free children from superstition”<sup>65</sup> by directing their instincts to expand the scientific explorations of the cosmos. Nonetheless, Bagley being so eloquent in highlighting this traditional approach, was not foresighted as per the challenges that this method would encounter and consequently, many authors like John Dewey have been keen to criticize it.

### **2.2.2. Challenges to the Traditional Model of Instruction**

John Dewey made two important critics of the teacher-centered model of education. Firstly, he remarked that this model relied primarily on the assumption that the future will resemble the past. And therefore, the teacher has the role of making students acquire “what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders.”<sup>66</sup> Through this argument, Dewey joins his voice to David Hume who rejects all relations of causality or inductive reasoning for its total dependence on past events as means of predicting the future. Hume considered induction as uniformity of nature.<sup>67</sup> Secondly, Dewey believed that the mature adults imposed their standards, subjects and methods on immature younger ones without consideration of the big gap between them.<sup>68</sup> Before we look into what Dewey proposes as a remedial method, it is important to go back to the context of thought of liberalism in order to situate him in a historical lane with J. J. Rousseau.

### **2.3. THE LIBERAL EDUCATION**

Liberal education refers generally to the “theory and practice that connects the intrinsic value of learning with the aim of a cultured and flourishing life.”<sup>69</sup> It seeks to enable the learner to develop his full potentiality. It is also understood as experiential or democratic education whereby the learner is at the center of all attention. According to Garrett Tracey, the learner-

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<sup>65</sup> J. WATRAS, “Developing a Democratic View of Academic Subject Matters”, 165.

<sup>66</sup> J. DEWEY, *Experience and Education*, Kappa Delta Pi, New York 1938, 19.

<sup>67</sup> D. HUME, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen BUCKLE, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, 29.75.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. J. DEWEY, *Experience and Education*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. D. R. DENICOLA, “Liberal Education”, in D. C. PHILIPS, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*, Sage, Los Angeles 2014, 475.

centered method of instruction is based on constructivist principles with the goal of creating a learning environment where knowledge is constructed by the teacher and students rather than transmitted.<sup>70</sup> Liberalism for Hannah Arendt implies the restoration of freedom for efficient advancement of modern world. Consequently, the restoration of the freedom of the learner is logically inferred,<sup>71</sup> with a presupposed spirit of democracy whereby everyone has equal chances.<sup>72</sup> But how can one attest to the idea of liberalism in the thought of Jean Jacques Rousseau?

### **2.3.1. The Origin of Liberalism in Rousseau**

We noted in the previous chapter that Arendt identified one of the causes of loss of authority in the American society with the assumption that children have their own world which is free from adults' influence.<sup>73</sup> This belief emerged from the thought of Rousseau in France before gaining ground in America. Rousseau believed that humanity occupied its proper place in the order of existence, just as childhood occupied its proper place in the order of human life. Therefore, all the society can do for the wellbeing of the child is to recognize this proper place of his.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Rousseau points out that this recognition is necessary because "childhood has its own methods of seeing, thinking, and feeling."<sup>75</sup> Consequently, adults should not try to substitute the methods of children with their own methods, or better still, adults should not impose their style on children.

### **2.3.2. Dewey's Progressive or Experiential Learning**

John Dewey is regarded as the most prominent figure of Pragmatism philosophy, which advocates that an idea is valuable if and only if it is practically applicable. He emphasizes much

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. T. GARRETT, "Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Classroom Management: A Case Study of Three Elementary Teachers", in *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, vol.43.1, 2008, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. V. NGALIM, "Subject Matter and Method: What a Pedagogic Dialectic in Dewey's Democracy and Education", in *Case Studies Journal*, vol.6, 2017, 63.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 181.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Emile or Concerning Education*, E. WORTHINGTON Trans., D.C Health, Boston 1889, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 52.

on the role of experience in the learning process to the extent of developing a new approach to learning known as the progressive approach. He believes that progressive education was the critic of the teacher-centered education because it emphasizes on the learner-centeredness. According to Dewey, students learn from their own experiences. And in this context, experience refers to whatever action a person tries to do to the environment and the response of the environment to him. Therefore, an experience is either active or passive.<sup>76</sup> He holds the view that textbooks are the fruits of various experiences of previous generations written in a logical manner. Accordingly, textbooks are tools which help the learner to solve problems he encounters in the process of experiencing, and that teachers should consult textbooks in view of having a sense of direction.<sup>77</sup> Dewey is actually supporting that children should learn by doing or practicing with the use of their senses. Neither the teacher nor the textbooks should override the autonomy of the learner.

Moreover, Dewey argues that there are some five principles which should be applied in any student-centered classroom. The first principle maintains that mastery of the subject-matter is of capital importance for the teacher. He must master the subject to his fingertips so as to remain in touch with whatever is going on in class as well as to notice the needs and doubts on students' faces. The "subject matter consists of the facts observed, recalled, read, and talked about, and ideas suggested."<sup>78</sup> The second principle states that teachers should never enter a classroom with a fixed or ready-made method for the day. Rather, they should have no-method and be flexible.<sup>79</sup> By this, Dewey implies that only the interaction *in situ* with student can determine which method to adopt. Next is the principle of interest which requires the teacher to answer to the needs and desires of students. Another principle is that of discipline

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. J. WATRAS, "Developing a Democratic View of Academic Subject Matters", 162-163.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. J. DEWEY, *Democracy and Education*, J. MANIS, ed., Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania 2001, 107.233.

<sup>78</sup> J DEWEY, *Democracy and Education*, 188.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

whereby he opposes the bribe of pleasure and the bribe of pain, referring to reward and punishment respectively. The last principle is of democracy which is characterized by sensitivity to each other's needs, dialogue, equity, fairness, and full participation in the classroom.<sup>80</sup>

### **2.3.3. A Critic of Liberalism**

Although liberalism enjoys the support of great contemporary educationists such as Paulo Freire, it is not without blame as Dewey predicted by pointing out two valuable remarks. Firstly, he notes that education based on personal experience of the child does not exclude at all the directive value of the knowledge and skill of the mature adult. Rather, such education calls for “... multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and consequently more guidance by others, rather than less.”<sup>81</sup> Dewey makes clear the importance and irreplaceable role of the teacher which was almost relegated due to the overemphasis laid on the child-centeredness. After all, it still belongs to the authority of the teacher to decide whether to put learners at the center or not, learners cannot choose. Secondly, Dewey insisted that the rejection of the external authority of the teacher and the rejection of all authority tout court are not *convertuntur*, that is, not convertible. Rejecting the external authority simply leads to the search for a more effective source of authority.<sup>82</sup> And this is exactly the reason why Parker Palmer proposed a new source of authority which is neither the teacher nor the learner.

## **2.4. THE SUBJECT MATTER OF P. PALMER**

Parker Palmer expresses his difficulty in choosing either of the above approaches because he found that there are good insights and excesses in both models.<sup>83</sup> As a way out, he

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Democracy and Education*, 105; *Experience and Education*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> J. DEWEY, *Experience and Education*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Cf. P. J. PALMER, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco 1998, 116.

proposes a synthetic approach which reflects elements of the teacher-centered and student-centered models of instruction. He states this:

Perhaps the classroom should be neither teacher-centered nor student-centered but subject-centered. Modeled on the community of truth, this is a classroom in which teacher and students alike are focused on a great thing, a classroom in which the best features of teacher-and student-centered education are merged and transcended by putting not teacher, not student, but subject at the center of our attention.<sup>84</sup>

What Palmer actually means is that instead of focusing either on the teacher as the sole source of all knowledge, or considering the student as already pregnant with knowledge yet uncovered, education should put the subject matter, which he called a *third thing*, a *great thing*, at the center of attention.<sup>85</sup>

Palmer identifies a classroom with what he calls a “Community of truth” whereby the subject matter poses as something laying beyond both the teacher and the student, such that it can hold them accountable for whatever behavior they portray. Palmer takes the example of the bishop who can hold both priests and parishioners accountable.<sup>86</sup> The teacher then is no longer the one to tell students what the truth is, rather all of them discover it in the subject. In this regard, one would realize that the notion of community of truth bears resemblance to Thomas Kuhn’s concept of paradigm which binds and directs the actions of all scientists during the period of normal science.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, in order to create a subject-centered classroom or community of truth, it does not suffice to dispose the chairs and tables in circular manner or dialoguing. “A sense of community [or connectedness] can also be generated... through lectures, lab exercises, fieldwork...”<sup>88</sup> And Palmer believed that the positive consequence of the subject-centered education is that it avoids narcissism by which either the teacher poses

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<sup>84</sup> P. J. PALMER, *The Courage to Teach*, 116.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. T. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1962, 24.

<sup>88</sup> P. J. PALMER, *The Courage to Teach*, 115.

like a supreme king, or the students pose like innocent beings, incapable of wrongdoings, which is altogether untrue.<sup>89</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This section tried to account for the debate between the teacher-centered and student-centered methods of instruction. On the one hand, we noted that W. Bagley proposed the conservative approach as means of controlling students' behavior via adaptive instincts. On the other hand, we observed with J. Dewey that the student-centered model of instruction was born as a critique of the teacher-centered model. He advocated for the fundamental role of personal experience of the learner and made him the principal protagonist of all learning. Between these two poles, P. Palmer introduced a neutral stand, the subject-centered method, which binds both the teacher and learner to account for their conduct. But which of the three models can be more effective in making students responsible, authentic and self-disciplined individuals? How can the Cameroonian system of education protect the teacher from the oppression of students while maintaining the freedom of the learner in the student-centered method? These are our concerns of the next chapter.

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. P. J. PALMER, *The Courage to Teach*, 117.

# CHAPTER THREE

## CLASSROOM CONNECTEDNESS AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

### IN THE CAMEROONIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

#### INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt believes that adult citizens have the right and duty to guide the younger ones to know the world and culture in which they find themselves; and the young have the obligation to follow the guidance of the adults who pre-existed them.<sup>90</sup> In this part of the work, we shall look first, at how authority can be said to foster connectedness between the teacher and the students and inculcate self-discipline in students in Cameroon. Second, we shall evaluate the students' aggressive attitude towards teachers within the lens of formation of young Africans at large toward a real mental and linguistic independence.

#### 3.1. ARENDT IN CAMEROON: AUTHORITY FOR THE CAMEROONIAN LEARNER

The Cameroon educational system is the mirror of the double colonial heritage of Great-Britain and France. As a result, the system is divided into two subsystems: anglophone and francophone. The first is applied in the North West and South West regions; the second in the other eight regions. The system is ruled by the law N° 98/004 of 1998 on the Orientation of Education, and the law N° 2001/005 of 2001 on Higher Education.<sup>91</sup> But how is authority expressed in this educational system? These laws, while they do not treat directly of authority, face a difficulty in application today. Starting with the types of authority of Arendt, the Cameroon system practically values only the authority of the personal type, not that of the functional type. The work of teaching is neglected, especially in primary and secondary schools, with underpayments and lack of rigor in formation and recruitment of teachers. Furthermore, the system makes the learner equal to the teacher by restricting the power of the

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 92.

<sup>91</sup> MINEDUB-MINESEC-MINEFOP-MINESUP, *Draft Document of the Sector Wide/Education*, n.p., 2005, 22.

later on the former as it advocates “the strict respect of the freedom of expression”<sup>92</sup> of the student, that is, argumentation or persuasion. With the loss of authority in classroom, anything can happen at any moment.<sup>93</sup> Students will water down the memory of illustrious authoritative teachers who have positively impacted the lives of many learners who still remain grateful to them today.<sup>94</sup> Thus, it falls short of Arendt’s ideal.

Also, the Law on the Orientation states : “L'intégrité physique et morale des élèves est garantie dans le système éducatif. Sont de ce fait proscrits : les sévices corporels et toutes autres formes de violence...”<sup>95</sup> that is, the physical and moral integrity of students is guaranteed in the educative system. So, these are banished: corporal abuses and all forms of violence. And that : “L'Etat assure la protection de l'enseignant et garantit sa dignité dans l'exercice de ses fonctions.”<sup>96</sup> Or, the state assures the protection of the teacher and guarantees his/her dignity in the exercise of his/her functions. Arendt also argued for the protection of the teacher when saying that the assumption according to which children’s world is out of control of adults, puts the teacher in a situation of helplessness in front of students.<sup>97</sup> Granted that the authority of the teacher is part of his dignity, the state claims to ensure it. But in actual fact, this is not the case because the laws do not provide any explicitly protective measure for the teacher. The protection of the learners is overemphasized to the neglect of that of the teacher.

With regard to corporal punishment, both Arendt and the Cameroon laws argue for its abolition. And this is where we differ with Arendt because it is our contention that the actual situation of indiscipline and school violence in Cameroon ought to be addressed with corporal punishment as the last option left to the teacher after trying patiently softer measures. Like Skinner, we hold that punishment is one of the surest means, alongside reinforcements/rewards,

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<sup>92</sup> P. BIYA, *Loi N° 98/004 d'Orientation de l'Education au Cameroun*, Article 34, Yaoundé 14 Avril 1998.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 95.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>95</sup> P. BIYA, *Loi N° 98/004 d'Orientation de l'Education au Cameroun*, Article 35.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 37 :2.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 181.

to produce a behavioral change in students in Cameroon for two reasons. First, because no provision is given as alternative measure producing the same result as corporal punishment. Second, because of the failure of most schools in handling cases of indiscipline in their own codes as the law has given liberty to schools to do so. On comparing the rules of four schools, we realized that some indicate verbal warning, kneeling down, etc. as types of punishment the teacher must give in class before transferring the case to the discipline master.<sup>98</sup> But others do not state any sanction at all, saying simply the dos and don'ts. What do we mean by connectedness?

### **3.1.1. Authority and Classroom Connectedness in Cameroon**

Paulo Freire attests that “without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no education.”<sup>99</sup> He adds that communication is an essential part of human nature without which no man or woman can truly be human.<sup>100</sup> The only means through which one acquires education is by dialoguing or communicating with others. Communication through language or speech is possible only for human beings,<sup>101</sup> and it is the lone feature by which understanding and agreement are made possible between teacher and student.<sup>102</sup> It is this communicative or dialogical nature of a classroom that we refer to as “classroom connectedness.” Connectedness is characterized by a peaceful atmosphere, favorable to effective learning.

Furthermore, Gert Biesta holds that “education is basically a relationship between an educator and the one being educated.”<sup>103</sup> A connected relationship between the teacher and students will undoubtedly result in the creation of a sense of community such that each member

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. St Joseph Calasanz Bilingual Academic Complex, “Rules and Regulations”, Article 8, 2023, 10.

<sup>99</sup> P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York 2012, 92-93.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. H. G. GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 61.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. H. G. GADAMER., *Truth and Method*, J. WEINSHEIMER and D. G. MARSHALL, trs., Bloomsbury, London 2013, 402.

<sup>103</sup> G. BIESTA, “Mind the Gap! Communication and the Educational Relation”, in *No Education Without Relation*, C. BINGHAM – A. M. SIDORKIN, eds., No. 259, P. Lang, New York 2004, 12.

can feel and care for the other when needed. Connectedness requires the teacher to enter into an ethical conversation with the student. In this line, Emmanuel Levinas maintains that “The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation.”<sup>104</sup>

### ***3.1.1.1. Decadence of Connectedness in Cameroon***

The teacher-student connectedness has deteriorated in the past two years in Cameroon. Students keep growing insolent toward teachers to the point that the latter are no longer considered as the authority to obey. Violence, verbal abuse, insults and prejudices are characteristics of this teacher-student dysfunction, which Arendt rejects. For instance, when a student from a rich home tells the teacher: “I can pay your miserable salary...” Moreover, some students consider the teacher as a big obstacle that must be removed. This antagonism was made visible when a recalcitrant and undisciplined student stabbed to death the principal of Yona School Complex in Nkolbisson in Yaoundé on Wednesday, April 06, 2022.<sup>105</sup> This however is not the first case of violence reported. Two years ago, a Mathematics teacher was stabbed by a student at the high school of Nkolbisson on January 14, 2020.<sup>106</sup>

### ***3.1.1.2. Way Forward***

In such a conflicting situation, we can affirm, like Freire, that learning cannot be effective again as long as there is no spark of good communication.<sup>107</sup> Also, Martin Buber attests that “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue.”<sup>108</sup> So, how can the teacher bring back connectedness? Teachers should start discussing personal difficulties of each student back at home, beside subject-matters. But the imposition of an atmosphere of discipline can serve

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<sup>104</sup> E. LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, A. LINGIS, tr., Duquesne University Press, Pennsylvania 1969, 51.

<sup>105</sup> M. MEFO, “Student Stabs School Principal in Yaoundé” 2022, in <https://mimimefoinfos.com>, consulted on November 29, 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. N. KAMSU, “Cameroon – School Violence: Student Stabs School Headmaster”, in <https://www.journalducameroun.com>, consulted on November 29, 2022.

<sup>107</sup> P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 92-93.

<sup>108</sup> M. BUBER, *Between Man and Man*, R. G. SMITH, tr., Routledge Publishers, London 2002, 116.

as a reliable remedy. Discipline will also help to remedy the loss of tradition Arendt demonstrated.

### **3.1.2. Authority and Self-discipline in Cameroon**

According to Treffry, et al., the term discipline refers, on the one hand, to the “practice of imposing strict rules of behavior on other people,” and on the other hand, to “the ability to behave and work in a controlled manner.”<sup>109</sup> For Kant, discipline is that dimension of education which transforms animal nature into human nature.<sup>110</sup> It “prevents man from being turned aside by his animal impulses from humanity, his appointed end.”<sup>111</sup> For this reason, discipline must necessarily be imposed early in life by an authoritative figure.<sup>112</sup> The neglect of discipline remains irreparable.<sup>113</sup> Discipline is one of the major characteristics that testify to the existence of an authority in the classroom or school. But what causes indiscipline?

#### **3.1.2.1. Causes of Indiscipline**

Indiscipline, as violation of rules and regulations, can be observed in different ways. It includes cases of improper dressing, lateness, disturbance, bullying, damaging property, drug abuse, etc. Some of the causes of indiscipline are viewed here as equal to the causes of the teacher’s loss of authority in Cameroon. First, the choice of liberal laws. Article 35 of Law N° 98/004 on the Orientation of education forbids corporal punishments in school. Minister Nalova Lyonga, reiterated this recently.<sup>114</sup> This decision, if applied strictly, leaves teachers powerless in front of recalcitrant students. In addition, some teachers do not give rules of conduct to students for their classes, creating a lawless classroom.

Second, teachers should endeavor to have full mastery of the subject matter. This is a key factor of possessing the personal type of authority of Arendt. Dewey also requests teachers

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<sup>109</sup> D. TREFFRY, et al., *Collins New English Dictionary*, HARPER C., London 1997, 211.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. I. KANT, *On Education*, trans. A. CHURTON, D.C. Health & Co., Boston 1900, 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. E. BENG, “Minister Nalova LYONGA Dangles Sanctions over Schools Meting Corporal Punishment on Students”, in <https://theguardianpostcameroon.com>, consulted on April 27, 2023.

to master the subject matter at their finger's tips. Third, it is impossible to maintain order if school authorities do not obey rules. The Principal and teachers should set a good example for students. Fourth, the neglect of the role of the Parent-Teacher Relationship. A good communication school-home facilitates the follow up of students on two sides. When a student realizes that he/she can be punished in the house for a crime committed in school, it forces him/her to sit up and adjust. Parents for their part, remain the first responsible of the proper upbringing of children, not the school. Even if some parents may need to work longer and harder to make ends meet, and will not have enough time for their children, they should frequently inquire about their children's behavior in school. Fifth, overcrowding. Some schools are too crowded that the teacher-student relationship becomes too poor. All learners do not get the same individual attention. This forces some to seek for it in creating disorder.

Six, the low self-esteem of teachers. Underpaid teachers portray low self-esteem in front of students from rich and influential families. Truly, the salary of teachers has grown smaller and smaller as the years have gone by. Schools have become first and foremost places of making money by the proprietors. This is true even for some faith-based institutions. The teachers who help make that money do not feel its impact. A teacher who does not eat well, dress well, or smell good lacks motivation and becomes a subject of mockery for students, and they will not respect him genuinely. In addition, the quality of Teacher Training begs the question now. Just a year of formation is not enough to train someone as a nursery or primary school teacher. Possessing knowledge is one thing and having skills to transmit it is another. Also, most of those recruited are above the age of twenty, having only Advanced Level Certificate with below average scores. We can say that these prospective teachers consider teaching as the last resort for sustenance.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, they bribe the examiners from

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. M. KWACHOU, "When Your Teachers Fail You: The Necessity of Improving Teachers Training for Quality Education in Cameroon", in *Young African Leaders Journal of Development*, vol.1, 2016, 110.

recruitment to completion.<sup>116</sup> Seven, students who have Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). They are pathologically inclined to oppose all figures of authority. How do these causes reflect in Cameroon?

### ***3.1.2.2.A Dilemma in Cameroon***

A few years back, teachers were seen as highly valued and esteemed members of the society. They were moral authorities for their students to the point that they could freely correct all their wrongs wherever they encountered them, even in the marketplace. Also, they were allowed to use corporeal punishment whenever necessary. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case today. The profession of teaching has lost its value and prestige in Cameroon. Teachers represent no more an authoritative figure, especially in secondary and high schools. From warnings and insults to death threats and stabbing, teachers have turned to prey and become afraid of students they are called to give natality as Arendt suggests. They who are, for Arendt, models for students by always knowing and doing more than them. As such, they cannot play the role of preserving the existing civilization by introducing learners to a world that is still unknown to them.

### ***3.1.2.3.Way Forward***

It is preferable first and foremost to consider students in their individuality rather than collectivity. Given that the classroom is made up of individual students, the teacher's role would be to personalize his/her approach of discipline by identifying aggressive students. That said, let us consider situations of stabbing and fighting. Here, the school administration needs to adopt strict rules like expulsion and extended manual labor. Any student who stabs, fights or is caught with a knife in the bag must be expelled automatically or must clean the school continually for two months for instance. However, stabbing can be prevented by a meticulous control of school bags daily. For the cases of indiscipline in the classroom, the teacher should

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. M. KWACHOU, "When Your Teachers Fail You: The Necessity of Improving Teachers Training for Quality Education in Cameroon", 109.

establish clear rules at the beginning of the courses and revise them often. He/she can involve students in setting the rules in order to increase their cooperation and responsibility. He/she should make sure there is a daily list of transgressors to evaluate the frequency of their acts. They should be punished by whipping, kneeling down, standing up, detention in class during breaktimes, doing extra cleaning works, or writing as many times as possible that they will not commit crimes again. Besides, teachers should practice mentoring with those students and maintain good Parent-Teacher relationship. Weekly evaluation meetings with students on discipline can also help. But how to internalize discipline?

### **3.2. FROM DISCIPLINE TO SELF-DISCIPLINE**

According to Brian Tracy, quoting E. Hubbard, “self-discipline is the ability to do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not.”<sup>117</sup> In this line, we define self-discipline as the capacity to impose on oneself and obey some realistic rules of behavior in order to attain a fixed objective set by oneself. Self-discipline is therefore an internal act pertaining to the individual alone. However, in order to acquire self-discipline, one needs the agency of an external motivator, namely an event, law or an authoritative figure that imposes the constraints. Thus, we can say that self-discipline is born of the discipline imposed by an external agent. The greatest challenge in acquiring self-discipline for the student would be the capacity to transfer that external authority to one’s own authority, that is, the ability to impose on and obey oneself.

Also, self-discipline is so essential for human flourishing because one needs to make great sacrifices and consistent efforts in order to attain an esteemed life status and become an “authority” in one’s field of knowledge. Self-discipline is therefore the only means by which one can climb above the ordinary and average. Each human being should ask him/herself this question: Why do some people accomplish so much more in personal and professional lives

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<sup>117</sup> B. TRACY, *No Excuses: The Power of Self-Discipline*, Vanguard Press, New York 2010, 7.

than others? For some, the answer lies partly in factors like intelligence, social skills, hard work and luck. But, for us, it lies greatly in self-discipline or hard work.<sup>118</sup>

### **3.3. TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT AND AUTHENTIC AFRICA**

Although African countries are politically independent, arguably, they are not with respect to education. B. Kishani points out the cultural alienation of African intellectuals, being more inclined to western values and standards to the neglect of African cultural values.<sup>119</sup> Also, Cameroonian students are portraying the same behaviors of students of other African countries. The encounter between young Africans and Western culture through social media leads to depreciating the value of African cultures. As result, African languages are more and more less spoken by young people. But “deemphasizing European languages is useless without a commensurate strengthening of young Africans’ mastery of their own African languages.”<sup>120</sup> The method of authority must be restored both in political and educational fields. Discipline is the only means of success for African students in personal growth as well as is resisting Western influences that reach Africa via social media. It is not that each tribe must study only in its own language. But local languages should be more promoted and taught in schools in Cameroon. African youths should be like a goat that does not eat every grass it sees.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. B. TRACY, *No Excuses: The Power of Self-Discipline*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. B. KISHANI, “On the Interface of Philosophy and Language in Africa: Some Practical and Theoretical Considerations”, in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 44, N°3, 2001, 36.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. V. NGALIM – N. SHANG, *Critical Thinking in Education: Introduction to the Philosophy of Education in the African Context*, Unpublished, 2023, 51.

## CONCLUSION

Here is the time for Africans to break with colonial policies in education in order to forge the truly Africanized mindset in all the youths. It is time to promote our own cultural values through teaching and learning of African languages in schools. As J. Calasanz would say, the value of respect of adults must be implanted in students in their early life so as to expect a respectful generation of young people in the nearest future.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. J. CALASANZ, *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools*, General Curia of the Order of the Pious Schools, Kochi 2006, 21.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

At the end of this work, whose aim was to restore the authority of teachers, their indispensable place and value that are lost in most schools in Cameroon, we reiterate that it is a necessity now to care for teachers in order for them to care more for learners. This goal was addressed by analyzing Arendt's view of authority, being the capacity to make someone obey, and by prescribing some solutions. She considered it as a natural necessity in education.<sup>123</sup> Secondly, we evaluated the contrast of this concept between the traditionalist and liberal approaches to education. Here, we attested with W. Bagley that teachers should control the learner's behavior by selecting only essential subjects. But we faced the antagonism of Dewey who advocated for the experiential learning that focus on the student. Afterwards, we esteemed it necessary to adopt the traditionalist approach for the sake of fostering classroom connectedness and imbuing the value of self-discipline in young Cameroonians in particular and Africans in general.

Although we advocate for teacher's authority, we do not argue for a totalitarian domination which abolishes all freedom to the extent of eliminating human spontaneity. Rather we propose the "authority... [which] always is meant to restrict or limit freedom."<sup>124</sup> Freedom ought to be limited by punishments so as to favor good classroom interaction and inculcate self-discipline, for "any such person [young] will always abuse his freedom if he has no one above him who can enforce his compliance with the laws."<sup>125</sup> Corporal punishments must be the last option left. All the suggestions given here, however, cannot claim to solve entirely every conflict of authority in the Cameroonian and African classrooms at large. That is why further research will be of great help to determine to which extend authority becomes a hindrance for effective teaching in Cameroon.

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<sup>123</sup> H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, 133.

<sup>124</sup> H. ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 404-405.

<sup>125</sup> P. KLEINGELD, ed., I. KANT, *Towards Perpetual Peace, and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2006, 9.

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